

GI balances faith, duty while deployed

Story and photo by
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BAGHDAD — Muhammad Sukarno wakes before sunrise and prepares. He spreads his mat on the floor of his sleeping quarters.

He cleanses his hands, face and body.

He removes his shoes. Sukarno is a devout Muslim.

He is also a U.S. soldier.

At sunrise, Sukarno begins his prayer.

He crosses his arms, closes his eyes and silently recites a prayer to Allah.

He bows, kneels, puts his face down.

Sukarno will do this four more times throughout the day: late afternoon, early evening, sundown and an hour after sundown.

He might have to conduct prayer on a break from guard duty or during morning physical training.

If he is out on a convoy or in a non-secure area, he might have to wait and combine prayers later in the evening.

Sgt. Muhammad Sukarno, a native of Medan, Indonesia, serves as a team leader with 1st Armored Division's 315th Psychological Operations (PSYOP) Company.

Despite his strenuous schedule and demanding days, which include

broadcasting command information and delivering PSYOP paper products, the deployment has not deterred Sukarno's faith. He conducts prayer five times a day and reads at least 10 pages of the Qu'ran every night.

"Even when I am out on the road, I will try to find a safe place to pray," said Sukarno.

Sukarno is also observing Ramadan, Islam's holiest holiday, though he can't attend Muslim services in a mosque or partake in evening Ramadan celebrations because of safety concerns.

"Ramadan is different here because I can't celebrate with other Muslims and I am not with my family," said Sukarno. "But it still has the same meaning for me. Ramadan teaches me a lot. I push myself to be a better person."

Sukarno says that being a Muslim and being a soldier rarely conflicts.

"Everyone has been really supportive and helpful," he said. "If I need a day off because of a religious holiday or I need some time to conduct prayer, my command and other soldiers are always really understanding."

Sukarno said he is proud that different people from different cultures can live and work together side by side in the military.

"I like to see everyone getting along," he said. "Everyone follows their own teachings, but can still live peacefully."



Sgt. Muhammad Sukarno, a native of Medan, Indonesia, serves as a team leader with 1st Armored Division's 315th Psychological Operations Company.

Civil affairs unit builds village for displaced Iraqis

By Staff Sgt. David Bennett
 367th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment
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TIKRIT — The children waited until the American soldiers were well out of sight before they scampered to retrieve the hundreds of bottles of water piled in the schoolyard.

Shy compared to other Iraqi children who revel in the company of American soldiers, these youths are members of the 260 Bedouin families ousted from their homes in Kirkuk earlier this year by the Kurds.

Now, they are seeking a new life in a newly formed village in Tikrit, and are supported primarily by soldiers of the 64th Corps Support Group.

The group, based at Fort Hood, Texas, has helped the 1,200 Bedouins settle in a former military compound that, since April, has afforded them a temporary home.

Bordered by Highway 1 and the Tigris Valley, the village, which was once a training compound for Saddam Hussein's Republican Guard, has been reduced to a rolling mass of stripped-down build-

ings devoid of doors, windows or fixtures.

"The place looks like it's been abandoned for 30 years; the looters have taken everything," said Sgt. 1st Class Richard Sahli, equal opportunity non-commissioned officer for the 64th and a resident of Killeen, Texas.

However, through the work of some soldiers attached to the 64th, there is a primary school on the site now, as well as a steady supply of provisions the Bedouin tribe members wouldn't otherwise have.

As improvements have occurred, other displaced Iraqis are calling the village home as well.

"It keeps growing because more people keep showing up," said Maj. Howard Geck, the civil affairs officer for the 64th.

Geck assessed early on that the makeshift village possessed few resources.

The nearest water supply is on a far side of the compound, which makes it difficult on many villagers who have to walk to retrieve water.

Because of this, soldiers attached to the support group routinely deliver drinking water to those most dependent.

Three months ago, the Albuquerque native hired

a local contractor to convert an existing structure into a primary school, that 70 girls and 105 boys now attend.

The government of the Salah Ad Din province, where the community is located, gave the camp official status recently by declaring it a village.

Although the village is meager compared to others outside Tikrit, residents of the village trust that quality of life will continue to improve.

Klulf Sahan is a sheik at the Bedouin village.

A farmer in Kirkuk for the last 35 years, Sahan lost his house and most of his possessions when he relocated his family to the camp.

Still, he said the Bedouin are grateful to have a place to stay as well as the Coalition's support.

"This is very good," Sahan said through an interpreter. "There is water and oil. (The villagers) are very happy."

Geck said there is still work to improve life in the village.

For example, sites are being tested now to determine suitability for water wells.

"As civil affairs guys, the sooner we work ourselves out of one job, the sooner we can move on to the next project," Geck said.

Crossed swords convey mixed message

By Ahmad Hammadi
Abdulameer

Special to Coalition Scimitar

BAGHDAD — “The idea of the two crossed swords was first organized by Saddam when he assigned the late sculptor Khaled Al-Real to design the monument,” said Iraqi

sculptor Mohammed Chain Hikmat. Hikmat took over when Al-Real died before work on the project started.

The idea of the monument is based on two crossed swords held by two hands.

Below these hands are many helmets.

The helmets, taken from the battle-

field, once belonged to Iranian soldiers that were killed in the Iraq-Iran war that lasted from 1980-1988.

The helmets are kept in a net, but some have rolled on the ground in random ways.

A depiction of an arrow explosion is seen below the net and hands as reference that they exploded the ground beneath them.

“This portrays the overwhelming power the Iraqi army had at that period,” said professor Mutadah, a sculpture instructor at the College of Fine Arts, University of Baghdad.

Al-Real borrowed the idea of the net and helmets from the history of ancient Iraq.

A sculpture of the Sumerians, who ruled the region thousands of years before the birth of Jesus Christ, shows that enemy soldiers were hunted in a big net, said Hikmat.

Al-Real’s original design – an Arabian sword and generic hands – is different than the current one.

“Saddam ordered me to change the Arabian sword to an Al-Qadissiya sword which he grants mostly for his military commanders and generals,” said Hikmat.

According to Hikmat, the Al-Qadissiya sword is different from the Arabian sword in length and shape. Its handle is thicker and at the end of the angle, there are the two half domes of the Martyr’s Monument. The Al-Qadissiya sword also required that the hands that held it be formed to fit it.

“I overcame this problem by suggesting having a new cast for the hand that holds the sword. Saddam suggested that it should be his,” he said.

The two hands and swords – made of pure copper – were created by a British company. The net was created

by another Iraqi sculptor, Miran Al-Saadi.

A special amendment was made by Hikmat for the two straight swords to form the arch when they are crossed.

“The arch represents Islamic architecture. The whole idea of the design is a mixture between the Sumerian and Islamic legacy in one hand and the stage of the period at which it was established on the other hand,” said professor Saad al Taei, the head of the plastic arts department, College of Fine Arts, University of Baghdad.

The original and the amended design didn’t have the Iraqi flag at the top of the two swords.

“It was suggested by Saddam to have the flag there, and also to write the words ‘by the name of God’ on the swords,” said professor Mamun Salman, sculpture instructor, College of Fine Arts, University of Baghdad.

However, the idea of the two swords making the arch of victory is still controversial among sculptors and scholars.

Professor Maymon Al-Khaldi, College of Fine Arts, University of Baghdad, believes that the arch “is a brutal way of portraying the victory.

The view of the two swords that cut the heads of the enemy soldiers is not suitable to be revealed in the monument of the arch of victory.”

On the other hand, Mr. Shadad Abdulqahar, a plastic arts artist, said, “the sword is a symbol of power in our history, so I think it goes very much with the concept that the arch of victory holds.”

Thus, the people of Iraq, whose roots go to the Sumerians, Akadians, Asserians and the Baghdadis, are very proud of their culture and power.

This is the message that the arch off victory tries to convey.



Some sculptors and scholars say the Arch of Victory, also known as the Crossed Swords Monument, in Baghdad is a symbol of the power of the Iraqi people.

Soldiers connect school to world-wide web

Story and photo by
Cpl. Todd Pruden

372nd Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

BAGHDAD — New computers and Internet capabilities were made possible for two local schools in the Al Adhamiya neighborhood of Baghdad with the help of soldiers of 2nd Battalion, 3rd Field Artillery Regiment, 1st Armored Division.

Soldiers with the communications platoon of Headquarters and Headquarters Battery decided to put their expertise to use in aiding in the reconstruction process in Iraq.

“When we first got here, we found out (the schools) were missing a lot of supplies,” said 2nd

Lt. Lucian Ilardi, a signal officer from Long Island, N.Y., with 2-3 Field Artillery. “Our forte is computers and automation and we decided to go that route.”

Ilardi submitted the paperwork to purchase and install the equipment. Each of the two schools received \$10,000 for the purchase and installation of the equipment, he said.

The items purchased include computers equipped with Windows 2000, printers and scanners.

Ilardi said the Internet café at the girls’ school in the Al Adhamiya neighborhood was the first public Internet café in Baghdad.

“I think the Internet, most of all, is going to open up their world here,” he said.



A soldier shows Iraqi students how to use the Internet in a school in the Al Adhamiya neighborhood in Baghdad.

Army nurse provides caring heart

Story and photo by
Sgt. Mark Bell
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BAGHDAD — 1st Lt. Sarah Grivicic wanted a challenge when she joined the Army three years ago. Now, she's an intensive care nurse assigned to the 28th Combat Support Hospital, in support of Operation Iraq Freedom.

Grivicic, 25, from Louisville, Ky., has the responsibility and challenge of ensuring the most critically-injured patients, both American and Iraqi, have the

best medical care in the heart of Iraq.

"I wanted a challenge to do something that could only be done within the military," she said.

Grivicic graduated from the 16-week critical-care nursing course taught at Walter Reed Army Medical Center and subsequently deployed to Baghdad.

This combination of events, she says, enable her to begin a new chapter in her life working on patients she knows might not live to see the next Baghdad sunrise.

Unseen to her sedated patients and working 12

hours a day changing bandages, clearing airway tubes, or maybe just holding the hand of a patient in his most desperate time, are just some of the things Grivicic does without hesitation and with pride.

"What is the hardest part of my job?" she asked. "The hardest part is also the best part of my job — being with a dying soldier."

Grivicic said she feels extremely privileged to be with a soldier during his last hours.

"I never understood what 'An angel with a face' meant until my arrival to

Baghdad," she said. "We are the last ones that they see or the last voice that they hear. It is our privilege to ensure that they are pain-free in their last hours, that they are not alone and are never forgotten."

Grivicic stands with pride knowing that she can remember every soldier's name she has cared for during Operation Iraqi Freedom — whether at Walter Reed Medical Center, in Washington, D.C., or across great blue oceans to the 28th CSH in Baghdad.

"I can tell you family members' names and how they first reacted when they saw their son or daughter," she said.

What is an Army nurse? An Army nurse is a highly skilled individual who is willing to sacrifice himself or herself to serve those who are dedicated to protecting our country, Grivicic replied.

"I feel so privileged to take care of soldiers," she said. "The energy that comes from an Army nurse once an American has arrived is so awesome."

Grivicic also said her job is to ensure the patient's unit needs are taken care of. "Even if it means your shift is over or that it is your off day, if it means blood all over your uniform, you don't care, you give all that you can to them because you care for them."

Because at that time in need, Grivicic said she is their sister, mother or their loved one.

"You ask for nothing in return — no overtime or compensation — because the feeling you have taking care of a soldier is worth more than anything that is tangible," she said.

Self-described as a very compassionate, liberal and open-minded person, Grivicic said she prefers to be non-confrontational and finds that a hard part of being an Army officer.

"I am very playful and love to joke but at the same time can be very serious and

sensitive," she said. "I am very balanced and a people person. I love people and love to spend time with them."

Although Grivicic has been assigned to the combat hospital since early October, chief of critical care, Lt. Col. Mary Tenhet, said Grivicic and other new staff to the hospital allow the facility to grow into a better medical treatment center.

"Because she is new, she brings new energies and a fresh set of eyes to what we are doing here at the hospital," Tenhet said. "Every day here is groundhog day. It's important for us to have new people rotating into the hospital."

Tenhet said since she has graduated from the critical care course, Grivicic has proven to be an effective and caring nurse.

"Nurses who graduate from the program definitely come out better care providers for our intensive care wards," she said.

Grivicic said her skills as an ICU nurse are critical.

She said the 28th CSH patients are very sick with multiple health issues or injuries, so it is essential to have ICU-trained nurses.

"We use critical-thinking skills to think of creative ways to improvise equipment we are lacking and to see positive outcomes despite the shortage of resources," she said.

At the hospital only a month, Grivicic has already proven her abilities to the hospital's chief of nursing, Lt. Col. Theresa Sullivan.

"She is motivated to do the job here," Sullivan said.

Sullivan recalls observing Grivicic provide patient care.

With numerous patients under her care, Sullivan said, she still had the time to do range of motion rotation exercises with her Iraqi patients.

"It was just amazing to stand back and watch her make the extra effort—to go to that extreme to care for her patients," Sullivan said.



1st Lt. Sarah Grivicic, an intensive care nurse assigned to the 28th Combat Support Hospital, in support of Operation Iraq Freedom, in Baghdad, flushes a nasogastric tube on a critically ill patient.

Community center unites neighborhoods

Story and photos by
Spc. Chad D. Wilkerson
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BAGHDAD — Every day, soldiers in Baghdad travel down the city streets, through neighborhoods and markets. They travel with their weapons loaded, watching people, buildings and vehicles for the source of the next possible threat.

The job that many of these soldiers have taken on, however, is not simply defending themselves against insurgents, or even finding and apprehending those that pose a threat to Coalition forces.

No, these soldiers have made it their mission to provide a better life to the Iraqi people.

Capt. Richard Graves, commander of C Co., Task Force 1-35 Armored Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division, has gone the extra mile to make life better for the residents of one central Baghdad community.

Graves and his soldiers provide security for three neighborhood districts in the Coalition's "green zone," but that's just the beginning.

Graves describes his role as that of "a facilitator."

"I listen to the problems of the residents here and then I do everything I can to find a solution."

Graves' humility belies the truth when you look at all that has accomplished in the Al Tashree neighborhood.

"The playground here is part of the community center," said Graves. "There were people in need of medical care, and we come into the neighborhood every other day to talk with the Iraqis about their problems and concerns. I had the idea back in May that we needed a place that would be one-stop shopping for the residents here."

The solution, said Graves, was a community center for Al Tashree to act as a meeting hall for the Neighborhood Advisory Council, as well as a medical clinic for those in need of minor care and a playground for children.

"It is difficult for the people here to get medical treatment because of their location, and the U.S. Army will not treat Iraqis unless it is a 'life or limb' case," said Graves. "I was able to track down some people from Red Crescent and asked them if they would be willing to open a clinic here, and they were happy to."

One of the unique qualities of the assistance: it cost the U.S. and Iraqi governments nothing.

Some the facets of this community center have been privately funded and sponsored by the Red Crescent. Graves and his soldiers donated other services. Graves also made a few deals with locals.

"I spoke to a local man who wanted to sal-

vage all the scrap metal from buildings in the area that were destroyed during the conflict," Graves said. "I told him that I wanted a playground for the community center, and I just got lucky. He had an entire playground that he and some workers disassembled, brought over here and welded together in the yard."

Second Lt. Luke Sparks, fire support and information operations officer for C Co., said he sees the community center, playground and clinic as the perfect way for Coalition troops to make contact with the public and hear the problems people have that need to be solved.

With the lack of communication capabilities in Baghdad, the center also serves as a forum for Graves and his men to get information out to the public.

"It is good for the community to see us out here listening to their problems, helping with what we can and playing with their kids," Sparks said.

The work for the community is far from over, Sparks said.

The goal on this small-scale mirrors that of the Coalition's goal for the rest of the nation: a free and sovereign Iraq.

"I would like to see us be able to leave and this community (would) be able to stand on its own two feet and do well," Sparks said. "With what we have been able to accomplish, we are giving them the confidence to do that."

Graves said there is always someone on duty at the center to listen to and record the issues and suggestions.

He visits weekly to monitor progress and to hear new concerns and to find solutions.



Three Iraqi girls play on swings at the Tashree community center playground in central Baghdad. Capt. Richard Graves, commander of C Co., Task Force 1-35 Armored Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division, helped arranged for the playground to be built.



Second Lt. Luke Sparks of the 1st Armored Division plays with some children at the Tashree community center playground in central Baghdad. The division's soldiers built the community center, which also houses a medical clinic.